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SUBJECT: GREECE PUSHING MACEDONIA NAME ISSUE WITHIN THE EU

Classified By: Rick Holtzapple, PolOff, Reasons 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) The Council Secretariat's Macedonia desk and a Dutch diplomat who works on Balkan issues tell us the Greeks are pressing to get the EU to pressure Macedonia on its on-going name dispute. Next Monday's (April 25) General Affairs and External Relations Council is due to issue Conclusions on the final round of Macedonia elections, calling for proper response to concerns flagged by the OSCE. Given this opening, the Greeks are seeking to add a reference to the "UN arbitrator Matthew Nimetz's most recent proposal" (or something to that effect), calling it "a good basis for negotiations", and calling on all parties to respond positively. Our Dutch contact said several member states don't view this language as particularly germane to the topic at hand (conduct of elections), and want to keep the EU out of what they hope will remain a bilateral debate/negotiation on the name. But that does not mean the Greeks won't get some reference inserted in the Conclusions next week.

12. (C) The Greeks have also approached Solana, asking for him to pressure Skopje to respond positively to "Nimetz's proposal". Solana has spoken in the last week with not just the Greeks, but also Nimetz and Macedonian President Crvenkovski. But we were told that as far as Solana has been willing to go in talks with the Macedonians is to note that some ideas are on the table, stress the importance of reaching a solution on this issue, and express the hope that the parties will take various proposals seriously.

13. (C) Solana's staffer said he still did not believe the issue was particularly close to a solution. At least at the staff level, the Council Secretariat's analysis is that the best chance for a solution on the name will come at the end of this year, between a (presumably) positive Commission "avis" on opening accession negotiations with Macedonia and the Council's decision (by unanimity, meaning with Greek assent) to accept the recommendation and open negotiations. That's when Athens would be presumed to have the greatest leverage over Skopje.

14. (C) There is a sense among EU officials here that Skopje is simply playing for time and believe they might be able to "get all but Athens" to accept "Macedonia" as the country's name, while Athens is getting nervous about the consequences of letting the issue drag on. While not necessarily viewing Skopje's attitude as the most constructive, several EU member state representatives in Brussels who handle Western Balkan issues have told us they think "it would just be easiest to get on with it and use 'Macedonia'" -- although in a classic EU display of courage they all hope some other member state (Germany is the common example) will lead the way, since their own government won't or can't.

MCKINLEY

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